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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 003503

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: JORDAN'S PM BADRAN VISITS SYRIA

REF: AMMAN 3394

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: Prime Minister Adnan Badran, accompanied by his foreign and interior ministers, conducted a two-day official visit to Syria on May 2-3. Charge registered USG displeasure over the visit with King Abdullah and Royal Court Minister Muasher in light of the effort to isolate Syria diplomatically. End Summary.

2. (U) Bilateral issues appear to have dominated an official two-day visit to Damascus by Jordan's Prime Minister Adnan Badran May 2-3, which received front-page coverage in most local papers. Badran, who was accompanied by Foreign Minister Qasrawi and Interior Minister Yarfes, told reporters after meeting his Syrian counterpart Mohammad Utri that means to enhance bilateral relations, particularly implementation of an agreement signed in February on economic, commercial, tourism, and border issues, were high on the agenda. Badran announced that he and Utri agreed to establish a "hotline to overcome obstacles facing the enhancement" of economic cooperation. They also discussed the Iraqi and Palestinian situations, emphasizing Jordan's commitment to Iraq's stability on one hand, and to the roadmap on the other.

3. (U) Meanwhile, Yarfes and Syria's Defense Minister Hassan Turkmani signed an agreement to exchange civil defense expertise and cooperate during natural disasters. Yarfes also met with his Syrian counterpart Ghazi Kanaan to discuss border issues, according to press reports. Qasrawi met with Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq al-Shar'a and "reviewed the latest regional developments."

4. (U) On May 3, Badran met with President Bashar al-Asad. Badran told reporters that he had delivered a letter to Asad from King Abdullah that dealt with "bilateral ties," but did not elaborate on its contents. Badran said that Asad invited King Abdullah to visit Damascus, and that the GOJ will study a Damascus suggestion to establish a "free transit zone" in Suwaidaa on the Syrian side of the border. The two sides also agreed to increase Royal Jordanian flights to Damascus and Aleppo, unify transit fees, facilitate travel procedures, and cancel residency fees.

5. (C) Comment: Oddly, Qasrawi did not mention the upcoming trip to Damascus during a meeting with Charge on April 28 to discuss Syria (reftel). Press coverage of the visit did not signal whether Lebanon or enforcement of Security Council Resolution 1559 was on Badran's agenda while in Syria. Noting U.S. efforts to isolate Damascus diplomatically, Charge on May 2 registered USG displeasure about Badran's visit with Royal Court Minister Muasher. Dr. Muasher asked that we not regard the visit as a problem because there is no change in Jordan's policy. Rather, it was part of the new PM's outreach to Arab states in the aftermath of damage caused to bilateral ties by former FM Hani al-Mulqi. Charge reiterated that the emphasis was on isolation. Charge said that we hoped Jordan would support this effort.

6. (C) Comment continued: During a private dinner hosted by King Abdullah in honor of CODEL Frist on May 3, the King pulled Charge aside to tell him that the visit was an initiative by the new PM, because he perceived a real need to "attend to" bilateral relationships in the region (he mentioned that Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah would soon be visiting Syria as well). The King said the main purpose of the PM's trip to Syria was to follow up on a border agreement signed earlier this year. It was in Jordan's interest, as well as that of the U.S., to do everything possible to stop terrorist infiltrations across that border. The Charge underscored the importance of isolating Damascus diplomatically, and indicated that Badran's visit was not helpful in this regard. Regardless of Jordan's motivations, the Syrians would use the visit as evidence that they were off the hook with regard to Lebanon, which was not the case. The King acknowledged our request for a strong message on implementing 1559, but said that it would have been inappropriate for the PM to criticize his hosts while still in Syria. He assured Charge that Jordan would look for an opportunity to make a public statement supporting Resolution 1559 soon. Jordan's policy of joining in pressuring Syria was unchanged. End Comment.

7. (U) Minimize considered.

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HALE